

# Numbers: The Beginning of Disobedience

By  
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*“Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, “from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. “And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house.*

*-Numbers 1:1-4*

After finishing the book of Exodus I was, admittedly, conflicted about where to go next in our study through the Bible. At first I thought that it might be a good idea to go to the New Testament for a time, possibly to the book of Matthew or even Revelation, but ultimately I decided it would be best to continue the narrative of God’s people and their movement from slavery to the promised land. We will be “skipping” the book of Leviticus, mainly because I ended our study in Exodus by going through the Law, which included many quotations from the book of Leviticus.

But also, because the book of Leviticus doesn’t further the narrative of the nation any further. Instead, Leviticus serves as a detailed instruction manual for the priesthood for various prescribed rituals and laws, with really only one event occurring in the entire book which is the death of Aaron’s sons for offering “strange fire” before the Lord. In fact, from Exodus 19 all the way through the first 9 chapters of the book of Numbers, the nation of Israel is stationed at the foot of Mount Sinai for around a year. This was not only to give the people of God time to receive the Law of God, but also to provide time for the various artificers to construct the Holy articles prescribed in the Law, like the Tabernacle, the various vestments, the arc of the covenant and so on.

## Israel and the Hero’s Journey

But now in the book of Numbers, the people of God are ready to move towards the land that God had promised to their ancestor Abraham. Narratively, this is also an important facet of the “hero’s journey”. In most adventure epics, the “hero”, or protagonist of the

story, goes through various “trials” and difficulties on their way to forming their character and becoming the people that they should.

The nation of Israel, being the archetypal people group, are going through the various “steps” on their own heroes journey. Usually the hero is almost killed as a youth, they receive a call to adventure where they leave their father’s house, they encounter malevolence and evil, various trials, find love, overcome adversity, and then they return to their “father’s house” and find their own home (which is the true purpose of the heroes journey, to find home).

To take a famous story as an example, “The Lion King”. Simba is born as a prince, but is almost killed by the villain of the story as a child, is forced to leave home, he then encounters malevolence through the hyenas that chase him away, trials through the thorn bushes and desert as he is cast out of his father’s land, he finds love in Nala, overcomes his fears, returns home, and becomes king making Pride Rock his home.

Since this pattern is baked into human consciousness, at the deepest possible level, it shouldn’t surprise us that Christ Himself goes through this same pattern. He is almost killed by the evil of Herod as a child, leaves His father’s house in His baptism, journeys into the wilderness, confronts evil and malevolence through the temptations of Satan, encounters love (in Christ’s case it would be His love for His “bride” namely the church that He would build and redeem), overcomes evil by conquering the grave, and then ascends back to His Father’s house in His ascension back to heaven.

For our purposes though it is important to remember that the “hero’s journey” is not something that we encounter once, but over and over again through the course of our lives. In fact, every time we encounter great adversity, or some sort of cataclysmic shift in our lives, we are asked to repeat the hero’s journey, and remake our “home” in the process. To use a simple example, when someone moves from being a child to a teenager. In adolescence we have to leave the safety of our parent’s home and protection, venture out and find out who we are in the larger context of the world.

We make friends, encounter various trials, we usually encounter love and our first real brushes with malevolence and evil, and then we have to learn how to “return home”. How to incorporate what we have learned in this particular journey into who we already were. Another larger example is our conversion. We venture out of the safety of our “home”, we discover God, and then we have to incorporate our faith into the life we were already living, which transforms and hallows our existence.

If we are paying attention to the narrative pattern, Israel was almost killed in their infancy by the wrath of the Pharaoh, they were forced to “leave home” when they were subjected to slavery (but this happened literally with Moses when he is first raised by Pharaoh’s daughter and then flees from Egypt to Midian), they confront evil in the Pharaoh through the plagues, are delivered into the wilderness, found love in their covenant with God, and now are returning to the home of their fathers. However, what we are going to see is that instead of fulfilling the true hero’s journey, they will instead fail to return home and remain in the wilderness for a generation.

This is an aside, but this is actually why the Hebrew name for this book is “in the wilderness” and not “Numbers” like the English title. The Hebrews named their books after a phrase given in the first verse of the book, like Genesis for them is “in the beginning”. Admittedly this naming scheme works quite well in some books, but not so well in others. So the second book that we call “Exodus”, for them is called “Names”. But in this case, the Hebrew title is far better than the English version.

We named this book “Numbers” because there are two censuses given at the beginning and end of the book, (and we will talk in this paper about the good and bad contained in this action), but it is unfortunately a non-descript title that would make most want to skip the book instead of studying it. “In the wilderness” is a better title because it better expresses what this book is, a failure to return home, or, getting stuck in the wilderness. So while most “hero’s journeys” ends with a return home, every now and then there is a story where the hero fails instead of succeeding. In more depressing stories, this would be a “tragedy” instead of a “comedy”.

In other words, instead of the hero overcoming evil, they are overcome by it. Sometimes becoming villainous themselves, but most of the time, merely arresting their development and having to repeat the trial later on. Using our earlier example, this would be the teenager who, instead of returning home and reconciling their maturity with their innocence, they instead leave the wisdom of home and go through a prolonged adolescence, refusing to grow up and refusing to take responsibility for their lives.

To use a famous movie as an example, this is episode five of Star Wars. Luke is warned that he is not ready to confront his father Darth Vader, but he refuses to listen and is beaten badly in a fight and is almost killed. As a result of his failure, his friends are all dispersed in various ways, the empire is able to rebuild, and he has to fight a more powerful empire in the following movie. This story is no different. When confronted with the various temptations and challenges that are leading the people home, they are overcome by all these temptations and challenges. As punishment, God causes His

people to wander in the wilderness for forty years so that the older generation can die off and the younger generation can succeed where their parents failed.

Because of this, this is actually a really important book to study. As inspiring as it is to watch a movie or read a book about a hero who does the right thing, unfortunately, we often fail when we are confronted by adversity, and so we have to “wander” for a time, and then repeat the trial later on. Because of this, this book will help us understand why we fail, the cost of failure, and what it takes to recover and repent.

This is also important because we very rarely do this. Many of us are “stuck in the wilderness” in various forms, or have our maturity arrested, but we never ask the important question, why? What might we be doing wrong that is causing a consistent pattern of failure, and what might we do differently? The overall reason why God has to judge the older generation of Israel is their refusal to do this, they respond to failure with complaint because they can't face their own sin, or reckon with their own issues.

We will go through their specific sins in future chapters, but in this paper, I want to focus on what God does for His people to prepare them for their coming challenges. This will help us understand what it takes to be prepared to face coming adversity, but this will also help us understand what went wrong in their preparations.

Since we are doing a brief overview of nine chapters, it would be good for me to give a brief summary of these nine chapters here: the first few chapters of Numbers are readying the people of Israel to march into the promised land. God has delivered them from Egypt, brought them into a covenant with Himself, delivered to them the Law, and now He is moving them to the promised land, to warfare and the establishment of their kingdom. The first couple chapters bring the camp into order, numbering the tribes, minus the Levites, and establishing the order of marching.

Then God prioritizes religious purity within the nation by numbering the Levites, and establishing their different roles. This transitions smoothly into laws of purity, chapter 5, for the people, removing impurity from among themselves. Then the laws for the Nazarite, a special vow of purity and holiness, that lasted for a set time, with Samson as a notable exception in the book of Judges.

Then, chapter 7 deals with offerings from the entire tribe, chapter 8 deals with cleansing the Levites, who represent the people as a whole, and then chapter 9 has the people celebrate the Passover in the wilderness, presumably, for the last time. The main section of this chapter actually deals again with the question of ritual purity and observing the feast day.

The latter versus, and the beginning of chapter 10 deal with procedures for moving the camp. The movement of the presence of God signifying their need to move camp, and the blasting of silver trumpets to announce the move to the people. In verse 11 of chapter 10, the people actually leave Mount Sinai in the second month of the second year since they left Egypt.

## Counting the Cost

*“Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, “from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. “And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house.*

*-Numbers 1:1-4*

Although the first chapters of Numbers are indeed tedious and hard to get through, they need to be understood in their context to understand their purpose. Even though the people of God have been through some harrowing events through the narrative of the Exodus, we need to remember that these are recently freed slaves. As such, not only did they have no established military, they were actively discouraged from being able to defend themselves by the Egyptians so that they would remain docile and subservient.

This untrained and undisciplined mass of people, that also contains women and children, are now being marched into hostile territory, inhabited by brutal, pagan, warrior tribes living in fortified cities. This is a fact that wasn't lost on the people, and would later undo them. Because of this, God has Moses take a census, specifically of military aged males. Doing this served two purposes. It gave Moses an idea of his military potential, but it also reminded the people of the imminent danger they were about to face.

This is an invaluable piece of wisdom that we would do well to keep in mind. As our Lord puts this point:

*“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—“lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, “saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ “Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not*

*sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?"*

*-Luke 14:28-31*

Jesus specifically makes this statement about the cost of being His disciple, but it contains a universal wisdom. Any transition or intervention carries with it substantial sacrifice, but also a massive potential for victory, and a massive consequence for failure. For the people of Israel, as great as it was that God delivered them from slavery, it isn't much of a deliverance to be a tribe of perpetual refugees, they need a home. But in order to inhabit their ancestral home, they had to be ready to fight with the current, brutal inhabitants. Therefore, even if they succeeded, they would need to be willing to sacrifice a lot of lives and resources in order to take the land. But, if they win, they gain a homeland, and if they lose, they lose their freedom and potentially their lives.

In myths this is portrayed as the monster that guards the treasure. Whether it is the Cave of Wonders in "Aladdin" or the dragon Smaug in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit", these stories are supposed to remind us that every potentially beneficial thing is "guarded" by dangerous potentials and will require effort and sacrifice to obtain our desired goals. Even in the gospel, God's "treasure", namely His people, were being "guarded" by the monster, death itself. Only when death was defeated, through a massive sacrifice on God's account, could He gain His treasured people and redeem us from the grave. This is why the apostle Paul says this about a trial he was facing:

*"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."*

*-1 Corinthians 16:9*

Notice that when Paul mentions the "great effective door", he directly links the potential benefits to adversity by saying "and there are many adversaries." So whether the transition we are facing is as large as becoming a disciple of Christ, to pursuing a career, to getting married, to something as basic as graduating from school, all of these things constitute "great effective" doors that have many adversaries "guarding" them. In order to boldly, and wisely, confront these adversaries, we have to know what they are, what tools we have at our disposal to counter these problems, and we have to keep clearly in our minds the "treasure" set out before us.

## An Order of Movement

*"And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting. "On the east side, toward the*

*rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies; and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be the leader of the children of Judah.”*

*-Numbers 2:1-3*

This leads into the next point, we have to establish a correct order in our desires, or to put this another way, we need to have our priorities straight. When God orders the tribes sequentially, before their standards, and with the Tent of Meeting at the heart of the nation, that is exactly what He is doing. Each tribe is going forth bearing their own standard, which would remind the people that they weren't fighting for some abstract ideology or potential good, they were fighting directly for their families and their people.

By having the Tent of Meeting at the center was to remember that the presence of God is what hallowed their people and gave centrality to the nation, though they were made up of various tribes and families. But all these things were laid to the side that they might fight for the glory of God, and the good of their families and themselves. This is also why the nation doesn't receive a national symbol yet. Their "symbol" would be the Ark of the Covenant. They didn't fight for a nation, since they aren't a nation yet, they fought for God and in accordance with His will and not their own. Later when Israel finally comes into the land, their leader Joshua has an encounter with an angel who reminds him of this truth.

*“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”*

*-Joshua 5:13-14*

The angel of the Lord reminds Joshua that they were fighting for His purposes, and whenever they forgot that, or fought for other purposes, the Israelites ended up losing to the inhabitants of Canaan. This becomes a universal principle for us. Whenever we enter into a season of transition, if we don't have our priorities in the correct order we will fail. Take someone who is starting a new career. Succeeding in the job should be an important priority, but it should never take priority over say, the person's family, or their integrity. There are many people who find success in business at the expense of their families or their personal integrity and find that the trade off was simply not worth it.

More important than any physical blessing is the state of our souls. We must take care of our character above all else, and that means orienting ourselves towards God, and the priorities that He has given to us, above all else. This is what it says about our Lord:

*"...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

*-Hebrews 12:2*

## The Cost of Purity

*"Now it came to pass, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, that he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings, and the altar and all its utensils; so he anointed them and consecrated them. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' houses, who were the leaders of the tribes and over those who were numbered, made an offering."*

*-Numbers 7:1-2*

Which leads to the next point, to keep our priorities right, we have to be willing to sacrifice to them. The longest chapter in the book, and the second longest chapter in the entire Bible is Numbers 7. This massive chapter details offerings made from each individual tribe to the various needs of the priests and the tabernacle structure.

What God is establishing for His people, and us, is that setting priorities is not a mere act of the heart, it is something that we have to embody and be intentional about. It would have been easy for God to simply rain down from heaven the various articles necessary for the Tabernacle, but instead He has His own people provide for the structure and the priesthood themselves.

But this truth is communicated also in the numbering of the Levites, who are offered fully to God for direct service to Him, and in the Nazarite vow contained in Numbers 6, which is a peculiar vow of purity and holiness before God. In all these sections, God is hammering home the importance of keeping our priorities straight, and remaining pure before Him. What we will see in this book is that setting priorities is actually fairly easy, keeping them through adversity and temptation is really where this principle gets tough.

This lesson remains true for us today:

*“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

*-2 Corinthians 9:6-7*

The one who is truly seeking to place God at the center of their heart is the one who can truly give cheerfully. Not begrudgingly, or in a way that seeks a blessing from God, but someone who loves God enough to see giving itself as the blessing. We don't simply do this with giving, we do this with our time, when we choose to spend our time and attention on God and His glory, as well as our efforts, as we seek to honor God in the way that we behave. By acting out this fidelity, we can not only set our priorities correctly, but we can keep them in the proper order.

## Resolve Internal Conflict

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, ‘then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.’”*

*-Numbers 5:5-7*

As the nation prepares to confront external turmoil, the last thing they need is internal conflict. So God reminds His people to pay attention, not only to their internal purity, but also to make sure that they are tending to their personal relationships. Making sure that trust and fidelity are reigning supreme and that the people are unified before their conflict.

This again becomes an important theme throughout the book. Israel is not undone by external foes, but by internal division. That is why this chapter is so vital. God doesn't offer His people a platitude about living in harmony with one another, or even give them a stern warning to maintain peace within their nation, He instead gives two important rituals necessary for maintaining peace. One is in the passages that I quoted above about the necessity of confession and making amends when there is wrong committed. The other is given a few verses later, in one of the most odd and difficult to interpret passages of the Old Covenant which has to do with a husband who suspects his wife of committing adultery.

I won't endeavour to explain this ritual in its totality, because it is admittedly strange and does rely on miraculous intervention from God to determine a person's guilt of innocence, but here is the passage in question:

*“then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance. ‘And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD. ‘The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. ‘Then the priest shall stand the woman before the LORD, uncover the woman’s head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. ‘And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband’s authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. “But if you have gone astray while under your husband’s authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you”—then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—“the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; “and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make your belly swell and your thigh rot.” Then the woman shall say, “Amen, so be it.” ‘Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape them off into the bitter water. ‘And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her to become bitter.”*

*-Numbers 5:15-24*

In essence, the jealous husband makes an offering to God which he gives to the priest. The priest takes the offering and has the woman hold it while he takes dust from the ground and mixes it with some water. He then writes potential curses down for the woman if she is found guilty through this “trial” before God, and then puts them in the water and has the woman drink it. If the woman is innocent she will be unharmed, if she is guilty some sort of a physical deformity will plague her, many believe that it would make her barren, and then she would be put out of the community.

Without getting into the physical elements of this passage, which are admittedly strange and hard to understand, let's instead focus on the symbolic elements here. The husband can't make blind accusations against his wife, he must *sacrifice* before God and place his wife in a vulnerable position. The wife must submit to this trial and drink something that would be gross, but not dangerous in any normative way. But the

elements she is drinking are water, a picture of life, dust, a picture of filth and fragmentation (which is why Moses brings forth lice from the dust in Exodus), and then she has to imbibe the curses into her body and await God's justice.

I certainly don't advocate for anything like this today, but when we break this down it makes sense. A relationship can't last on bitterness, jealousy, and accusations. It must instead be founded on truth, fidelity, and trust. In a marriage, if someone doubts their partner, they should be willing to make their accusations known, but they should also be willing to offer up their accusations to an authority intent on settling the matter.

This is not the normal gossip that we are familiar with today where someone is offered up to the court of public opinion, this ritual shows reverence and intentionality. When we put these two rituals together what we get is that God is intent on having true harmony amongst His people. This isn't superficial relationships, but instead deep relationships that require true transparency and repentance when someone is wrong. While we should always seek this type of peace in our personal lives, a time of transition is especially important to seek peace with those nearest to us, because they will be the ones most likely to keep us on track and to help us through potential problems:

*"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

*-Ephesians 4:1-3*

## Remember Your Story

*"Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. "On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it." So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did."*

*-Numbers 9:1-5*

Just as the people of Israel were asked to tend to the practical concerns, their spiritual concerns and their relational concerns, they are now asked to tend to their own story.

When they were going into the land inhabited by “giants” they needed to remind themselves of the great deliverance that God had already provided for them.

All too often we fail to deal with present trials because we forget all too soon how God delivered us from previous trials. Of all the things that we are most responsible for in this world, at the top might be our own story. We must remember it, understand it, and be faithful to live out its lessons. This might be the biggest failure that we will see in this book. The people of Israel do not attend to their own story and suffer greatly for it.

## The Danger of Arrogance

*“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, “Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it.” And Joab answered, “May the LORD make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord’s servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?” Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab. Therefore Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem.”*

*-1 Chronicles 21:1-4*

I wanted to end this paper by showing the main indication that this book will end in failure, and that is the act of numbering itself. While the people of Israel will eventually fail in all the areas mentioned above, they begin their journey by being faithful to these things. However, there is an interesting correlation in the Bible between arrogance and counting. In the above passage, King David takes a census of Israel after he established his kingdom and won great victories over the Philistines.

But this act of counting seems to be a proud boasting, a reliance on personal strength and not God, which is why it is condemned. This theme of “counting” continues in the kings. After a major victory over the Assyrians, king Hezekiah is visited by an emissary from Babylon where he shows him all his great wealth. After this happens, the prophet Isaiah rebukes him:

*“And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.” Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the LORD.”*

*-2 Kings 20:15-17*

At the height of his glory, David's son Solomon entertains a foreign queen from Sheba where she takes "inventory" of all Solomon's greatness. As the chapter progresses though, we are given a hint that this act is the beginning of his downfall:

*"The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold..."*

*-1 Kings 10:14*

To my knowledge this is the first time the ominous number 666 is used in Scripture, which is the number of man, 6, since this was the number of days to the creation of man, repeated in totality, that is three times. But obviously this number shows up again in a more well known section of Scripture:

*"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666."*

*-Revelation 13:16-18*

In the totalitarian empire of the anti-Christ, all are made to bear this number in order to buy and sell. Without getting too deep into this topic, let's merely tie it in to what we are talking about today. There seems to be a correlation in Scripture between "counting" and arrogance. It seems that when mankind tries to put everything under our control, we are moved to "take inventory".

This doesn't make the census in this book a bad thing, remember that God Himself commands it, only that the temptation of man is to take the good call of God, which was for the Israelites to remember what they are about to do and take proper responsibility for their armed forces, and unfortunately take their numbers as their hope. But what God is always trying to remind His people is that the world happens within His will and for His purposes, we can't "number" our way to certainty as we might like.

In our present world this is a terrifying problem. With the advent of AI, and the ubiquity of statistics, polls, and betting markets, in our arrogant madness we tend to think that we can find security through numbers, or taking an account of things. But we are taught something very different in Scriptures:

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

*-Proverbs 1:7*

To be wise is to be understanding of, and submitted to the natural order of things. But we are told that the journey to wisdom can't begin unless we admit our utter ignorance. To acknowledge, as Hamlet chides his friend Horatio:

*“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”*

*-Shakespeare - “Hamlet”*

Again, this doesn't make the act of “accounting” bad, only the arrogance that so often accompanies it. Once the people of Israel start moving, they immediately begin questioning God on His provision, His leadership, and finally His plan to bring the people into the land. The sin of Israel is fundamentally a proud arrogance towards God, and the seed of that arrogance is contained in these early chapters.

This is why Christ, who is born under an emperor, is born in Bethlehem specifically because he chose to take a census.

*“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.”*

*-Luke 2:1*

In trying to exercise total dominion over his empire, this emperor tried to take account of all his citizens, not knowing that born within his empire was his King and God. Man can't account for the will of God or His purposes. This is why humility is the beginning of wisdom. Only when we acknowledge that truth are we able to receive the wisdom that is available to us without assuming more than we actually know. The person who is learning this lesson is always astounded by their own ignorance, but is still willing to act, knowing that God is in control.

The arrogant person may act, but they act according to their own strength and in light of their own wisdom, assuming that it is absolute. Another type of pride is the person who is astounded by the ignorance, but uses this as an excuse for inaction. True humility appears in acknowledging ignorance and devotion to God, doing what we can to be responsible for our actions, and trusting God with the results His purposes.

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.”*

*-Proverbs 3:5-7*